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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this module is to help the Child Development Associate (CDA) intern develop an awareness of the problem-solving process and factors affecting problem-solving abilities of children. The teacher should be able to recognize opportunities to enhance children's abilities to solve problems. Objectives are stipulated, activities for achieving each objective are suggested, and an assessment checklist is provided. A study guide emphasized (1) the nature of problem-solving, (2) the similarity of the problem-solving process to the steps used in scientific inquiry, (3) factors which influence an individual's problem-solving abilities, (4) the use of science activities to enhance problem-solving skills, (5) opportunities for group problem-solving activities, and (6) teaching techniques. A list of resources for further study and a supplement providing guidelines for encouraging children are included. (Author/RH)

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Competency Based Training Module #17

ENHANCING QUESTIONING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITIES

by

Ann Migliaro

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NOTE TO THE INTERN:

This CDA training module has been prepared as a guide for you and your CDA Advisor to help you to develop certain practical skills necessary for your work in an early childhood center. Although it contains many useful ideas, it is not intended to be a self-study program. Many decisions about your training experiences are left up to you and your CDA Advisor. The activities given in this module are "suggested" activities, and should be used if they are appropriate to your learning needs. You or your Advisor may come up with other activities more appropriate for your particular situation, children, or background of experience and training.

Your Advisor will evaluate your performance in each of the objectives. S/he may do so right away on the basis of skills you already have, or s/he may evaluate you after you have done some learning activities, or both. If you think you already have the skills required by some of the objectives, you should ask to be evaluated right away. You may not have to do any activities for some of the objectives. You do, however, have to demonstrate the required skills for your advisor; you cannot just tell s/him that you have the skills. If your advisor has already observed some of the skills before you entered this module, s/he may check you off on those skills without further observation.

When your Advisor has evaluated your performance in an objective area as satisfactory, s/he will initial and date that objective as completed in your copy of this module. When all of the objectives have been initialled, you have completed the requirements of this module and have earned credit. Keep this module as your permanent record of completion, and as a reference to use in your classroom.

As you can see, how fast you are able to complete this module depends on a lot of things: how much time and effort you can put into it; how much help your Advisor can give you; how much experience and training you have already had.

The Arizona/Nevada HSST/CDA Program hopes that you find your participation in CDA a valuable and practical training experience. We would appreciate any suggestions you may have for improvements in the training program and in this module.

ENHANCING QUESTIONING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITIES

CDA TRAINING MODULE #17

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This Module relates to the following CDA Functional Areas:

5 - Cognitive

6 - Language

7 - Creative

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ENHANCING QUESTIONING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITIES

INTRODUCTION

Problem-solving is the use of thinking aided by language to meet the demands of unfamiliar situations. Questioning, the first step in the problem-solving process, is the conscious realization that a problem exists. The problem-solving or decision-making process is used by adults in many day-to-day situations, from deciding what clothes to wear each day and doing the family grocery shopping to making decisions which affect the future well-being of their families. Adults have had so much practice in using the problem-solving process that the steps are often done automatically without much conscious thought.

Children must develop the techniques of solving problems in order to become independent people. The skills required for problem-solving are much the same skills required for the process of scientific inquire: questioning, observation, classification, comparison, prediction, verification. Problem-solving abilities also depend heavily on language abilities.

It is the purpose of this module to help the Intern develop an awareness of the problem -solving process and the factors which affect problem-solving abilities and to help s/him use opportunities which classroom activities offer to enhance children's abilities to solve problems.

OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES, ASSESSMENT

CDA Intern's Name_____

Date of Entry_____Date of Completion_____

OBJECTIVES	SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES
1. The Intern will be able to define problem-solving. ASSESSMENT _____ date/initial	1. Read Section I of the Study Guide. a. Discuss, with your Advisor or other Interns, the ways you have used problem-solving today...yesterday... within the last week. b. Discuss with other staff members instances you have observed of children solving problems.
2. The Intern will demonstrate an awareness of the steps in the problem-solving process. ASSESSMENT _____ date/initial	2. Read Section II of the Study Guide. a. Identify a problem in your center. Using the steps outlined in the Study Guide, formulate a solution. b. Role play the problem-solving process with other staff and/or your Advisor.
3. The Intern will demonstrate an awareness of the factors which influence an individual's problem-solving ability. ASSESSMENT _____ date/initial	3. Read Section III of the Study Guide. a. Observe children in the free-choice period. Note any problems which arise and the child's method of dealing with the problems. b. On the basis of observations, identify skills individual children need to develop to aid them in the problem-solving process.
4. The Intern will provide classroom activities which encourage development of individual questioning and problem-solving abilities. ASSESSMENT _____ date/initial	4. Read Section IV of the Study Guide. a. Discuss with your Advisor how activities from different curriculum areas help children to develop problem-solving abilities. b. Add something new to a different interest center each day for a week. Record children's reactions to the new materials. (Did it stimulate questions? How were the materials used?) Discuss your observations with your advisor.

OBJECTIVES	SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES
	c. Observe one child confronting a problem in an interest center. How many of the steps can you identify?
5. The Intern will provide classroom activities which encourage group problem-solving abilities.	5. Read Section V of the Study Guide.
	a. Discuss a week's planned arrangements and schedules with your advisor. Identify those activities which encourage group problem-solving abilities.
ASSESSMENT	
_____ date/initial	b. Make a list of "What if...?" questions and use them with children in more than one type of small group activity.
	c. Collect some pictures which pose hypothetical problems. Present one to a small group and see what solutions they come up with. How many steps can you identify?
6. The Intern will become acquainted with and use appropriate teacher techniques which encourage questioning and problem-solving.	6. Read Section VI of the Study Guide.
	a. Visit another center and record any teacher techniques which encourage questioning and problem-solving. Discuss your observations with your Advisor.
ASSESSMENT	
_____ date/initial	b. Tape record your own interactions with children and discuss with your Advisor techniques you may or may not have used.

ENHANCING QUESTIONING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITIES

STUDY GUIDE

I. Problem-solving is the process of using reasoning or logical thought to meet the demands of an unfamiliar situation.

A. Problem-solving is used to gain new information about the physical world. When a child poses a problem or asks a question, some new information about the how's and why's of the world may be needed in order to reach a solution.

B. Problem-solving is used to make decisions of all kinds, weighing alternatives and deciding on the best course of action. Children who are developing problem-solving skills will need adult help in generating alternative solutions, thinking about the consequences of the alternatives, and weighing the alternatives to determine the best course of action.

C. The problem-solving process involves a certain amount of risk, and some "failures" are inevitable. The role of the teacher is to help children cope with their "failures" and turn their mistakes into learning situations. (For additional information, see Module #4, Cooperative Planning.)

D. Development of problem-solving abilities is valuable in becoming an independent and capable individual.

1. A child's being able to cope with the problems which he faces by himself will enhance the development of a positive self-concept.

2. It is impossible for adults to anticipate every situation in which a child might find himself. Therefore, it is impossible as well as impractical to directly teach children the way in which all situations should be handled. Instead, children should be encouraged to develop the problem-solving skills which will enable them to cope with new situations.

II. The steps in the problem-solving process correspond to the steps used in scientific inquiry and require similar skills. (For additional information about the skills of scientific inquiry, see Module #16, Developing Science Concepts.)

EXAMPLE: Consider the problem faced by a child who is trying to build a tall tower of blocks. Each time the tower reaches a certain height, it topples to the floor.

A. The problem-solving process begins with the recognition that a problem exists. Recognition of the problem generally takes the form of a question (questioning).

EXAMPLE: How can I make the block tower stand up?

1. The question does not need to be verbalized. Adults should be aware that young children who are working at a task may be solving many problems silently. However, verbalization can help to focus and to clarify the thought process and should be encouraged.

2. The nature of the question will determine the way in which a solution is sought.

EXAMPLE: If the question had been, "Why does my block tower keep falling down?", the steps in the problem-solving process would focus on reasons the block tower keeps falling. With the question posed as "How can I make the block tower stand up?", problem-solving will focus on ways to make the block tower stand.

B. The next step involves gathering information which is related to the problem (observation, classification). Some information will already be know from past experiences and must merely be recalled. New information may come from observations, written resource materials, or resource people. All of this information is in the form of concepts.

EXAMPLE: Some concepts which would be considered might be:

1) Balancing the blocks helps keep them stable.

2) If the foundation for the tower is wide, the tower is more stable.

3) If larger blocks are used at the bottom of the tower, the tower is more stable.

4) If the floor under the block tower is smooth and hard, the tower is more stable.

5) If the blocks are laid on the sides (rather than), the tower is more stable.

etc.

C. Next, the problem solver must think of possible solutions. At this point in the process, no judgments should be made about the solutions. Three categories of possible solutions are possible.

1. The problem solver can ignore the problem. This would end the problem-solving process, leaving the problem unsolved.

EXAMPLE: The blocks scattered on the floor after the tower has fallen would be either put back on the shelves or left where they have fallen.

2. The problem-solver could persuade someone else to solve the problem. This would also end the process for the problem-solver.

EXAMPLE: The child enlists the help of the teacher or of another child who is a more expert block-builder.

3. The problem-solver can take some action to solve the problem. Most of the possible solutions will fall into this category.

EXAMPLE: Possible solutions which correspond to information gathered would be as follows:

1) The tower can be rebuilt taking care to balance the blocks perfectly.

2) The tower can be rebuilt using more blocks at the bottom.

3) The tower can be rebuilt using larger blocks at the bottom with smaller ones at the top.

4) The tower can be moved from the carpeted block area to a part of the room with tile or cement floors.

5) The tower can be rebuilt by using the blocks sideways rather than end-to-end.

etc.

D. After possible solutions have been formulated, the problem-solver must then evaluate each possible solution (comparison).

1. This evaluation and testing may actually be done using a trial and error method until a solution is found. Without adult intervention, this step will be the final step in the problem-solving process for the preschool child. The first workable solution which is tried will be a satisfactory one for the child.

2. Each solution may be mentally examined, with advantages and disadvantages weighed against one another.

EXAMPLE: 1) This solution would take a rather high degree of skill and coordination to make the tower stand. Since the amount of concentration required to balance each block perfectly will take time, the time allowed for block play may be over before the tower can be finished.

2) Using more blocks at the bottom of the tower would make the tower more stable without taking as much concentration and time.

3) Using larger blocks at the bottom of the tower and smaller ones at the top would stabilize the tower, but the blocks would still need to be well-balanced.

4) A smooth, hard floor would make building easier, but the blocks must stay in the carpeted block area.

5) Using the blocks sideways would not produce the kind of tower I want.

E. The problem solver must then use the evaluations that he has made to select the best solution (prediction).

EXAMPLE: Solution (2) seems to be the best solution. Building the tower with more blocks at the bottom would offer the least number of disadvantages.

F. The final step is for the problem solver to try the solution he has chosen (verification). An evaluation of the final solution will aid in making decisions in the future.

EXAMPLE: The child would rebuild the tower using more blocks at the bottom. The success of this solution would then be stored in his memory to be recalled in helping to solve similar problems which may arise in the future.

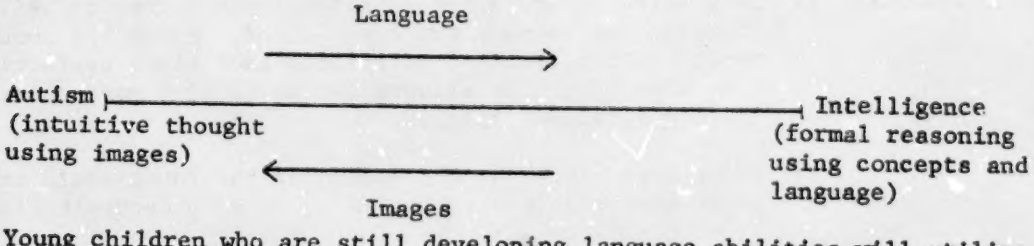
III. Many factors will influence an individual's problem-solving abilities.

A. Language ability is very closely related to problem-solving ability. The problem-solving process depends on a logical reasoning process, and reasoning is thought aided by language. Piaget (Reference #11, pp. 63-67) has contrasted the thought process which uses no language with that which solely utilizes language.

1. A simple type of intuitive logic occurs when images and symbols are used in the thought process. Since this process of using images and symbols, which Piaget calls <u>autism</u>*, cannot be communicated to others, it remains very simple and often faulty. Many logical steps may be missing from the intuitive thought process, resulting in false or incomplete conclusions.

2. Formal logic and reasoning utilize only words and language in the thought process. This type of thought, called <u>intelligence</u> by Piaget, is characterized by the manipulation of concepts in a complete series of logical steps, resulting in a true and correct conclusion.

3. Autism and intelligence can be thought of as the end points on a continuum.



Young children who are still developing language abilities will utilize a combination of these thought processes. As language abilities increase, they will progress toward the right of the continuum, using a greater amount of language and fewer images.

*This term as used by Piaget means thought without language or communication. It should not be confused with the behavior disorder known as autism (the autistic child), which is characterized by withdrawal and total lack of communication.

B. An individual's prior experiences will determine to a large extent the body of knowledge or concepts from which he may draw possible solutions. The larger the number of familiar concepts is, the more likely the individual will be to find a satisfactory solution to a problem.

C. The individual's stage of intellectual development will influence the process of problem-solving. According to Piaget, thought develops in a predictable sequence of stages (Reference #13, pp. 249-251).

1. In the first stage, the sensory-motor stage, the child learns about the world around him through use of his senses and by manipulation. Sensory-motor schemata, or patterns of action, are developed as his body of experiences grows. The thought process of this stage consists of these patterns of action; the child relates to everything in sensory-motor ways. This pattern of thought would correspond to autism discussed in Section II A.

2. From about the age of two to around the age of six or seven, the child is in the preoperational stage. His understanding of the world is expanded by his learning to talk. He begins to formulate elementary concepts of space, time, and causality, although true cause and effect relationships will not be apparent to the child until the next stage, the concrete operational stage. The term operations as used by Piaget can be defined as the means of organizing known facts or concepts about the real world in a way that they can be used selectively to solve new problems. In the preoperational stage, intuitive methods using a great deal of imagery are employed by the child.

3. The stage of concrete operations, from age seven to age eleven or twelve, marks the beginning of a true understanding of cause and effect. The child in this stage is able to trace physical operations stage by stage back to the origin when concrete objects are used.

4. During the stage of formal operations, the child gains the ability to deal with the abstract as well as the concrete.

D. The child's self-concept is an important influence on problem-solving ability. If the child views himself as a competent person who is able to deal with problems that arise, he will be more likely to be able to solve his own problems.

E. A child's tolerance of frustration will determine the length of time the child is able to work at a given problem.

EXAMPLE: One child may work intently for as long as five or six minutes at unbuttoning his coat until all of the buttons have been unbuttoned, while another child may make only a few attempts before he begins to tear at the coat in frustration.

F. The strength of the child's motivation to solve a given problem will vary from problem to problem. Children are more likely to stay at a problem in which they are interested or one of their own choosing than they are to solve a difficult problem which the teacher has chosen which is of little interest to them.

IV. Activities and materials in many curriculum areas offer individual children the opportunity to develop the skills needed in the problem-solving process and to practice problem-solving.

A. The science area offers many opportunities to enhance problem-solving abilities. (For further discussion, see Module #16, Developing Science Concepts.)

1. The skills which science activities develop are much the same skills needed for problem-solving: questioning, observation, classification, comparison, prediction, verification.

2. The hands-on materials used in the science area offer opportunities to help development of concepts and to solve problems.

3. The physical changes which occur in science activities and experiments lead children to explore causal relationships, helping them to develop concepts of cause and effect.

B. Language activities help the child move along the continuum away from autism toward intelligence. (See Module #13, Communication and Language Skills in Early Childhood Setting, for more information.)

1. Stories and books help to develop concepts of time, cause and effect, and sequence, and often give examples of problem-solving.

2. Riddles and open-ended questions offer excellent opportunities for children to practice a sequence of logical steps in finding a solution as well as to help develop concepts of causal relationships.

3. Any activities which help to develop language skills also help to develop thinking skills used for solving problems.

C. Any materials or activities in other curriculum areas which help the child to learn about the real world, to develop concepts, to think independently, and to manipulate and explore objects and materials for himself will help to develop problem-solving abilities.

1. The use of creative media helps the child clarify his concepts and thoughts of the real world as well as to offer excellent opportunities to practice his problem-solving skills through his attempts to make media do what he wants it to do. (For more information, see Module #25, Creative Media.)

2. Many materials used to help develop small muscle skills are excellent materials for developing problem-solving abilities as well: puzzles, beads, nesting blocks, table blocks, etc. (See Module #27, Small Muscle Development, for more information.)

3. Large muscle activities and creative dance activities also help to develop problem-solving skills. Problems may be posed, such as "How many different ways could we move with both our hands and feet on the ground?", and the children will need to use the problem-solving process to reach solutions. (See Module #26, Large Muscle Development, and Module #23, Music and Dance in the Early Childhood Setting.)

4. The block area offers many opportunities for the child to develop concepts of space, size, number, and balance as well as to solve problems using these concepts. (For more information, see Module #18, Blocks in the Early Childhood Program.)

5. Activities which help to develop number concepts will also help to develop problem-solving skills. (See Module #14, Developing Number Concepts.)

6. Children must be helped to discover alternative solutions to problems which arise from social interaction and expressions of feelings. Module #5, Guiding Behavior, and Module #22, Encouraging the Open Expression of Feelings, provide information on helping children independently solve these social problems.

7. Any activities which help the child to build a positive self-concept, a feeling that he is a person who is able to solve problems, will enhance his problem-solving abilities. (See Module #20, Building a Positive Identity, for more information.)

V. Opportunities for group problem-solving also help children to develop and to practice problem-solving skills. Some problems will arise in the center which affect all of the children. If all of the children are involved in finding a solution to those problems, the children gain valuable experience in problem-solving while finding a solution which is easier for them to live with and often superior to solutions which adults would have chosen. (See Module #5, Guidance Principles..., for a discussion of group problem-solving as it relates to establishing rules.) Hypothetical or imaginary problems may also be posed to groups of children as exercises in group problem-solving.

A. The group problem-solving follows the same steps as those used in individual problem-solving.

B. All possible solutions which the children offer should be considered. During the evaluation process of all of the suggested solutions, the children will often eliminate many of the solutions which are not feasible. If adults are unable to accept some solutions which are considered feasible by the children, the adults should present their reasons to the group ("This solution would not be acceptable to me because...").

C. Re-evaluate solutions after they have been tried. If changes need to be made, allow the children to help decide on these changes.

EXAMPLE: Group problem-solving from Crandall, Reference 4, p. 14.

The preschool was unable to fence the center's playground because of their location in an area of public gardens. The adults had reached the conclusion that the only solution would be to take the children to a neighborhood park for all of their outdoor activities, a process that would be time-consuming and would limit the number of activities which could be held outside. One teacher suggested that the problem be presented to the children. The children were brought together, and the problem was presented to the group. The children immediately began to offer suggestions:

One child at a time could play outside with a teacher.

The children could promise not to go near the gardens which surrounded the center.

The children could pretend that there was a fence.

One child recalled that her grandfather had used a prickly rope stretched around his living area in the desert to keep snakes and lizards away from his tent. The snakes and lizards would not crawl over the rope because it hurt their tender bellies. The children decided that they could get a large rope to put around the outside play area which the children, pretending to be snakes and lizards, could not cross. The teachers implemented this idea, and the children respected the limits set by the rope.

VI. Certain teaching techniques should be employed to encourage children to question and solve problems for themselves.

A. Allow plenty of uninterrupted time in the daily schedule for children to engage in activities in which they are interested (free-choice activities).

B. Show the children that the adults accept them and have confidence in their problem-solving abilities.

1. Not intervening in the child's activities shows acceptance and confidence in his abilities. Adults should never do for a child what he can do for himself. Stepping in to help a child with a task when the child has not asked for help gives him the message that he is not a capable person. The child should also be protected from the intervention of other children.

2. Passive listening will also show acceptance of and confidence in the child. Interest is shown by facial expressions, gestures, or short phrases or interjections (I see, Oh, Yes, etc.), but the acceptance shown by silence will encourage the child to solve problems for himself.

3. Active listening or reflection can help a child to clarify his ideas and thoughts while allowing him to reach solutions of his own. This technique requires that the listener act as a mirror or a sounding board, helping to clarify the meanings of the speaker without evaluating them. (For more information, see Reference #7, pp. 49-67.)

4. Offering encouragement, either verbally or nonverbally, also shows the child that you have confidence in him. See Supplement for more detailed information.

C. Use open-ended questions. These are thought-provoking questions which have no one correct answer.

EXAMPLES: How can you make your block tower stand? How many ways can you move your hands? What will happen if I add baking soda to vinegar?

1. Open-ended questions may be used to initiate problem-solving by verbalizing the problem in question form.

2. These questions may also be used to help the child focus his thought on a particular aspect of the problem he is trying to solve.

3. Cause and effect relationships may be highlighted by the use of open-ended questions.

D. The teacher should take opportunities to explore alternatives with children. This might be done by using open-ended questions (What would happen if...); by encouraging the children to think of many possible alternatives (What could you do? Is there anything else you could do?); or by offering direct suggestions of possible alternatives (Did you try...?). Any exploration of alternatives should come before an intolerable level of frustration is reached.

E. Verbalization and the development of language skills should be encouraged by talking <u>with</u> children and by listening to them.

F. Children will learn a great deal from their problem-solving experiences if they are allowed to experience the results of their solutions. Children should be given the opportunity to live with their decisions except in cases which present danger to them. When and if the child feels that the decision he made was not a wise one, he should be given the opportunity to change his decision if possible.

G. Self-evaluation should be encouraged by the teacher's asking questions which focus the child's attention on the results of his decision.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

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SUPPLEMENT

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SUPPLEMENT #1

ENCOURAGEMENT

Love and respect for a child's individuality can best be expressed through constant encouragement toward independence. Encouragement -- that most important aspect of child-rearing -- needs to start at birth and continue all through childhood. A child needs to have the courage to be imperfect. Courage is found in one who can make a mistake and fail without feeling lowered in his self-esteem. A misbehaving child is a discouraged child.

How do adults encourage children?

By what we say:

1. "I think you can do it", "You will soon be able to do it"
2. Use deftly placed suggestions
3. Give recognition for cooperative behavior
4. Use praise very cautiously
5. Avoid any word (or action) which indicates we consider him a failure
6. Make no suggestion that he doesn't know how to do
7. Avoid discourageing remarks
8. Avoid comparisons
9. Avoid criticism
10. Acknowledge effort

By how we say it:

11. The expression on one's face by showing faith, confidence, and love
12. The tone of voice
13. The tenseness of one's shoulder, muscles, and posture

By what we do:

14. Expect that he can do it
15. Allow him to try
16. Have confidence in his ability

17. Allow him to discover his own strength and ability
18. Allow messes -- don't make them seem big and important
19. Allow him to be imperfect
20. Ignore mistakes or ineptness
21. Separate the deed from the doer
22. Avoid humiliation or overprotection
23. Support the child and stand behind him
24. Promote a confident self-concept
25. Help the child to be self-sufficient
26. Allow him room in which to grow and test this courage
27. Work for improvement rather than perfection
28. Be humble, admitting that we make mistakes too
29. Keep your own courage up
30. Try "letting" instead of "limiting" -- call attention to strengths not weaknesses
31. Take time to listen when he needs to talk with you
32. Set standards the child is able to attain

How do adults discourage children?

By what we say:

1. "You might break it"
2. "Be careful!" "Don't run!"
3. "You are too slow"
4. "You can't do it well enough"
5. "You can do better than that"
6. "I knew you couldn't do it" or "I told you so"
7. Saying "Don't" instead of finding the "Do's" that the child is able to handle

By how we say it:

8. Tone of voice, showing fear, doubt
9. Expression on face and lack of confidence
10. Tenseness of body

By what we do:

11. Being unwilling to accept less than perfection
12. Setting our standards too high
13. Breaking their confidence in their own budding ability
14. Being unwilling to have messes or failure
15. Giving the feeling he is a failure
16. Calling attention to mistakes
17. Identifying what a child does with what he is (cry baby, thumb sucker, clumsy, etc.)
18. Giving recognition only for perfection
19. Re-doing their imperfect attempts to help
20. Implying inferiority
21. Giving the feeling that one is big only when one can show power
22. Being over-concerned about a mishap
23. Expecting him to be bad (by saying "Be a good boy now")
24. Humiliating him or emphasizing weakness
25. Punishing for something that is a normal and necessary part of growing up
26. Expecting too much too soon
27. Using too many "don'ts"
28. Expecting him to hurry
29. Pushing him into development for which he is not ready
30. Not expecting enough of him when he is able to do for himself and contribute to the welfare of others so he gets no opportunities to gain satisfaction from a feeling of independence and of making a contribution for the welfare of others.